

Welcome to the 39-Mile District, Missouri National Recreational River.

The mighty Missouri River watershed includes one-sixth of the United States and encompasses 529,350 square miles in the heart of the North American continent. It flows 2,341 miles from its headwaters at the confluence of the Gallatin, Madison, and Jefferson Rivers in the Rocky Mountains at Three Forks, Montana, to its confluence with the Mississippi River a few miles north of St. Louis, Missouri.

Before development, the free-flowing Missouri River represented one of North America's most diverse ecosystems. Braided channels, riparian lands, chutes, sloughs, islands, sandbars, and backwater areas abounded. By carrying high sediment loads, the river earned the nickname "Big Muddy."

Two programs, the Flood Control Act of 1944 (commonly known as the Pick/Sloan Plan) and the Missouri River Bank Stabilization and Navigation Project (1945), transformed the free-flowing river. The upper river now comprises a system of large reservoirs, and the lower river is composed of highly altered riverine reaches influenced by bank stabilization and regulated flows.

Lewis and Clark's epic journey in 1804-06 revealed a pristine Missouri River. Today, the Missouri National Recreational River is a showcase for cherished natural resources.

The Missouri National Recreational River in South Dakota and Nebraska is both a unit of the National Park System and the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The park comprises two segments separated by the Lewis and Clark Reservoir. The lower segment is a 59-mile reach from Gavins Point Dam to Nebraska's Ponca State Park. The upper segment is a 39-mile reach from Fort Randall Dam to Running Water, South Dakota. The upper segment also includes 20 miles of the lower Niobrara River and nine miles of Verdigre Creek.

In the 39-mile segment, the Missouri River retains the natural landscape of its namesake the "Big Muddy." The river channel varies in depth from a few inches to more than 30 feet and meanders from shore to shore. The river valley varies in width from 5,000 to 9,000 feet. During low water conditions the current is slow, moving at a lazy two miles per hour. Much of the shoreline along the Nebraska banks consists of forested chalkstone bluffs with willow and cottonwood trees growing on numerous islands and sandbars. On the South Dakota side, the river valley is up to a mile wide and is bordered by forested chalkstone bluffs and rolling hillsides. This section of the Missouri River has changed very little since Lewis and Clark first journeyed its length in 1804 and again on the return trip in 1806.

